

Letter from Gilbert Grosvenor to Alexander Graham Bell, April 17, 1908

April 17, 1908. Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, 1331 Connecticut Ave., Washington, D. C.
Dear Mr. Bell:

Complying with your request of yesterday I have much pleasure in sending you my ideas regarding the future of the A. A. P. T. S. D. and the Volta Bureau.

(A) The Association is directed by the leading educators of the deaf in America and through its admirable Review has been growing steadily in membership and influence, but it has now reached a point beyond which it will not considerably advance, in membership at least, unless several things are done. First: It needs the dignity of a permanent home: It should have a handsome building for its headquarters which could be pictured on its circulars and other correspondence in the effort to secure members. Second: The Review should be published monthly instead of 5 times a year. Members who hear from the Association only 5 times a year cannot have much Society spirit; the readers of its Review, unless they are professionals, are apt to forget the publication in the long interval between its appearance, the four months interim from June 1 to October 1 being particularly trying on the patience of 2 members who are not teachers; that is non professional members of the Association can't help wondering whether they are getting their money's worth in return for the membership fee. Of course nothing is more dampening to a member's zeal in getting new members than such a feeling. Third: The Review should be made to appeal more than it does now to the nonprofessionals who are interested in the deaf by using more pictures and by printing more untechnical articles. There are hundreds of thousands of families in the United States who have deaf relations or deaf friends and who thus have an intimate personal, but not professional, interest in subjects relating to the deaf. These people should be reached. They would be benefited by the Association and the

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Association in turn would be strengthened by their membership fees. This plan would be helped if the Review had a corps of Associate Editors to correspond to the Associate Editors of the National Geographic Magazine, whom the Editor of the Review could call upon for assistance in getting articles and suggestions. The plans outlined in the preceding pages, you will remember, were originated and applied by you to the development of the National Geographic Society when you were its President. That policy has resulted in a membership for the National Geographic Society of 33,000 today, nearly all 3 of whom are devoted to the work of the Society and help it to increase. The same plans could be advantageously applied to Am. Association.

(B) The Volta Bureau has a handsome building and a considerable endowment. To carry out its object, "the increase and diffusion of knowledge relating to the deaf", it needs: first a corps of expert educators of the deaf to direct its affairs, and second a periodical which can reach the public and the press. Both of these requisites the Association can admirably supply.

After considering the above conditions I have come to the opinion that the Volta Bureau should be merged with the Am. Assoc.; that its property and endowment should be transferred to be held by the same trustee that holds the property of the Am. Assoc.; that its building should become and be called the headquarters or home of the Association, and that its income from its funds should be expended by the Association in accordance with the wishes of the Board of Directors of the Association. I would incorporate the Assoc. in the District of Columbia in order that its home and place of incorporation may be the same, but I would not at present change its name. The Assoc. surely can "increase and diffuse 4 knowledge relating to the deaf" throughout the word under its present name. If it does not have this power under its present certificate of incorporation, the power could be inserted in the new certificate when it is incorporated in the D. C.' without changing the name.

Library of Congress

By this arrangement the name Volta would disappear. As Volta never did anything for and is not identified with the deaf I see no reason for keeping the name. The only reason why the name is now used is that the Volta Prix awarded Dr. Graham Bell was the “nestegg” of the foundation (\$10,000 out of \$250,000.).

By merging the Volta Bureau with the Association, the latter would become a great institution, corresponding in influence and power, in matters relating to the deaf, to the Smithsonian Institution or to the Carnegie Institution in matters of Science. Personally I should like to see the association called the “Graham Bell Association” or the “Graham Bell Institution”, so that your name should be identified by future generations with the education of the deaf, not in recognition of the above gifts, but because of what you by your life work have done to help the deaf to speak and hear to understand speech.

(D) Personally I think it would be unfortunate to have Miss Helen Keller assume charge of the Volta Bureau, even though her friends contributed a large fund to the Bureau on behalf of the blind. The education of the deaf and the blind is so different, involving such entirely different methods and problems, that an alliance would be unwise for both parties. Miss Keller's sympathies must naturally be almost entirely with the blind; the public thinks of her as the “wonderful blind girl”, and if she assumed charge of the Volta Bureau, the deaf part of the work in the public eye at least would be largely obliterated. At no distant day I hope this sweet and extraordinary woman may be able to found an Association to do for the Blind what the Am. Assoc., if given the Volta Bureau, will be able to do for the Deaf, but unquestionably each cause is stronger apart.

Sincerely yours, Gilbert Grosvenor.